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## *Saucepan Tales by Cellar-light*

Macgregor Card

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# SAUCEPAN TALES BY CELLAR-LIGHT

*by Macgregor Card*

## *The Buddha and the Bellman*

I know the Buddha! Oh do I ever know the Buddha! I have slept over him, I have slept on top of him. I have licked the ringmoths off paper lanterns and bitten ripe mosquitoes from hanging scrolls of flypaper, waiting for him to appear. On how many nights have I whistled away whole concertos and bitten off whole toenails, hangnail by hangnail, waiting for him to materialize in my belly? And on how many nights have I coiled above my stomach, armed with butterfly nets and garden sheers, protractors and gunny sacks, just waiting for him to fold my belly into a grin so that I might pin him down and cage him once and for all?

I know the Buddha! Oh do I ever know the Buddha! I know the smell of his booze: burnt ether with a twist of blood alcohol. I know the sound of his breath when it pours over his teeth like green gin: surely it sounds of a straw jackal lost in so many spinning capes and cloaks and curtains and carpets whirling like dancing skirts. I know there are green sheets floating to and fro in his closet, doing impressions of second dynasty emperors.

Oh do I ever know the Buddha! Not once have I met him, but God knows I've tried, and God knows he comes and goes through my stomach like green fog. And for someone so small he's certainly evasive. Certainly fleeting. Certainly and definitely ephemeral and temporal and altogether evanescent and transient. Oh yes he is! A terribly evasive apparition, you know he really is.

Oh do I ever know the Buddha, and how I will fold my belly into a mad grin when I sprawl him under my needle or my knitting irons, my garden sheers or my fountain pen. And how I will stuff him into a gunny sack and sling him over the tallest branch of my oak tree. And I will have a brown-bagged Japanese lantern of the highest sort drooped fat over the highest branch like a pregnant beehive. And there will be yeast in the air! And there will be cause for the breaking of bee-combs!

But forgive me for not telling you of that night in the bellshaft of a small church in Greenwich. Yes, it's all coming back to me now. He spoke to me that night. I was hanging on the clapper of a great bronze bell and my eyes were lost in the wood inlays of the floor (it's a hobby of mine, in case you were wondering, this hanging on bell clappers above bellshafts. When I was a child I would swing all day on the wind-chimes my sister hung above the cornfields. And when I'm far from a bell, I'll often hang on people's words and look down and deep and darkly into their mouth, and my eyes will lose themselves in the inlays of voice and intonation, so full of breath and green fog and footprints and bottled spirits that I roll my tongue against

the roof of my mouth to be sure that I still exist partly for myself).

Yes. It's all coming back to me now. The clouds were swinging across the moon like lanterns of mad lake-papyrus or frozen drifters of tumbleweed thoughts, and the moon cast shadows the size of whooping cranes up and down the quiet belltower. My hands were cold against the copper clapper. The rim of the bell was Irish rust, and inside its tempered brow were cold hieroglyphics in half-shadows and half-rhymes. I began swinging my feet in patterns to match the wood inlays far below on the floor; and the whooping crane shadows swooped and the copper clapper grew warm in my hands and the rim of the bell hummed as a voice in my stomach grumbled and then spoke.

"Where are the needles and the knitting irons? Where are the gunny sacks and butterfly nets now that you have me as sure as a smile on your belly. Try and bend me over the blades now. Come and cut me close, beautiful Bellman! I command you to sling me over your oak tree in a Japanese lantern. But wait, why don't you celebrate? Why aren't you breaking the bee-combs? Are those your arms I see trembling? Hold still, your fat rolls when you tremble.

Am I mocking you? Don't whimper, it's very unbecoming. Have you lost interest in me? Of course not, your ears gyrate when you're excited.

I have a story. I have many stories I would like to tell you. Would you like to listen? Do you really have a choice? Should I pour you a drink first? No? Then relax your grip and hang still, your swinging legs distract me.

As I've said, I have many more stories than you have options, and I intend to tell each one. This is an aviary, is it not? Then let my words fly around you amongst the birds in half-shadow and the hieroglyphics in half-rhyme. Let them gape at you like these shadow-puppets dripping down the broken beams and bellshaft walls of this rusting Irish church in Greenwich

Listen:

## *A Cellar Invocation to the Great and Omnipotent Saucepan*

The young girls who played with blue ribbons on their rooftops wouldn't have cared about the second flood if it weren't for the fact that they couldn't draw hopscotch lines on the ocean. Said one girl, "Why, the lines would just be washed further and further apart, and after a few hours you might have to jump two miles to the next square." But they busied themselves with their blue ribbons, which, a month after the flood, they had tied to themselves, to each other,

and to their chimneys.

Those girls were the lucky ones however. Their houses had attics. Their parents had the foresight to choose houses with attics. For no thought can take place in a house without an attic. Lying in bed, one's thoughts take shelter there after evaporating through the ceiling. An attic is a place for ravens to perch on molded books and stare through the knots in the ceiling planks at night; for a family to bury their grandparents, and for their grandparent's bones to kick over broken rocking chairs and sprout grass and thistles in the floorboard cracks.

And that is why the flood, in Chile and Peru, in Nepal and Tibet, in North Dakota and a small woodmill in Ontario, could never rise above the strongholds of well-preserved attics. And it's a shame that the Taj Mahal had no attic (but what wonderful onion domes like falling Byzantine scarves). And it's a shame that neither the Mayan pyramids nor the buildings on Capitol Hill nor the skyscrapers in Chicago's South Side had attics. Roads and railways were devoured within a minute. Boulder gardens and front porches were doomed in the next. After three minutes houses were ripped off foundations, and cellars were exposed and excavated by the flows and flurries in furious high tide transformation.

But attics of the world unite! For everyone knows that when people emerged from their attics, they saw water all around them and the decapitated tops of houses floating all around them, and all around them attics rolling up and down on their hind planks and groaning when the tide slapped salt and spray up their pipings, a boulder garden of attics and ocean all around, as far as the eye could see.

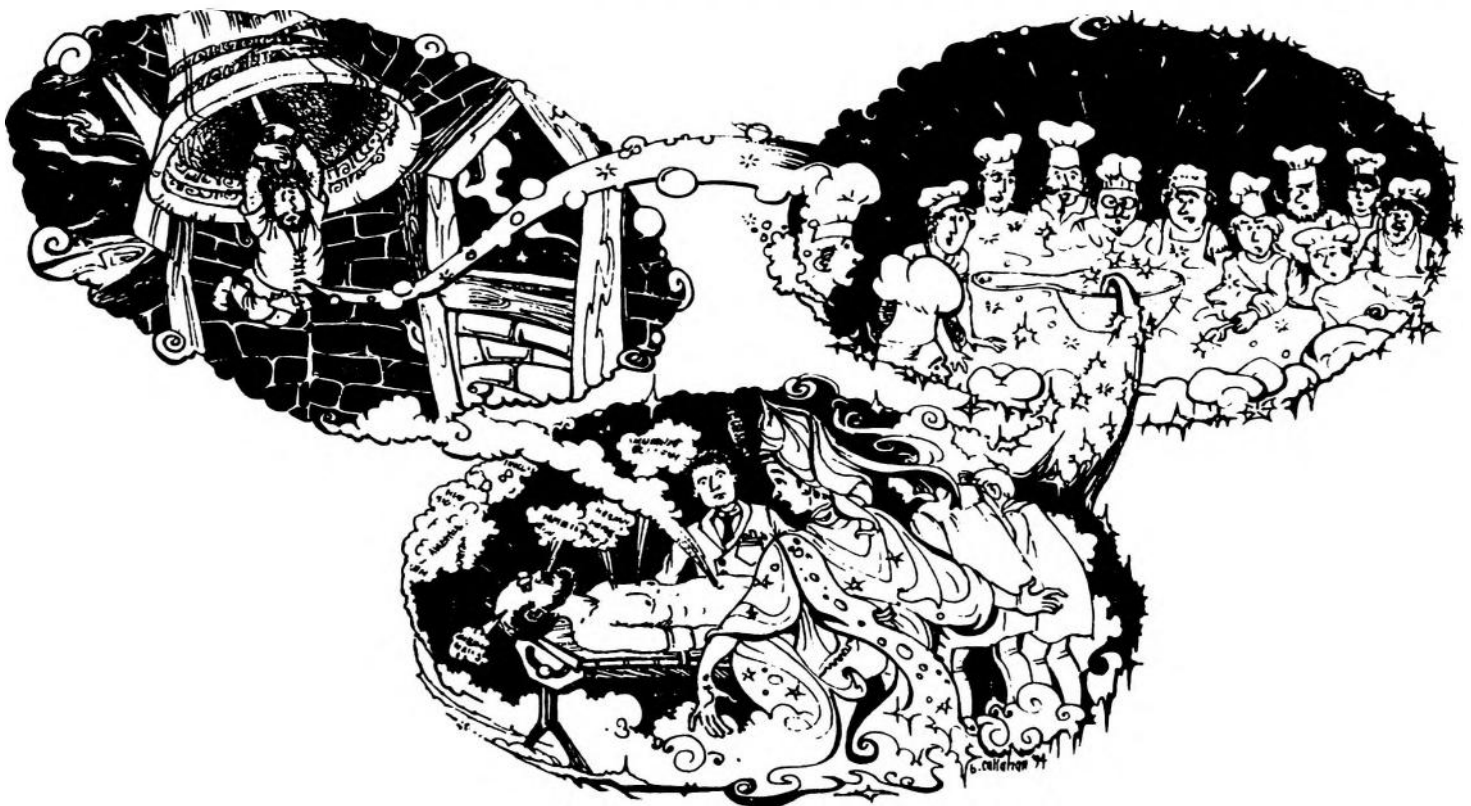
But this story deals with the town where the young girls traded in their hopscotch shoes for blue ribbons to swing from chimney to chimney and tightrope across the heightened expanse of the sea.

You can imagine that all of the cooks in town were in a panic. Their steamers and broilers and fine cutlery were buried with the shellfish. They had no recipes for algae or seaweed or dog-hair kelp. They had no food and nothing to catch or cook it with; and each cook secretly missed his favorite wooden spoon or bent spatula or hanging spice-rack rich with a harvest of oregano and basil and thyme.

When people panic, meetings are called. This needs no explanation. In fact, as was later discovered, no individual person actually called for the Conference of Concerned Cooks. The meeting called for itself, because that is what happens when people panic.

It was on a Sunday afternoon when the call sounded out. The girls on the rooftops stopped playing with their blue ribbons. Grandparents forgot their chess games on the sun decks (people by this time had built sun decks extending from their attics with the wood from old furniture). The call went out like this: "Tombs of bottled titmice, vaults of salted betelnuts, a gyroscope eloped with the duchess of a jewelry box. Tombs of bottled titmice, vaults of salted betelnuts, a gyroscope eloped with the duchess of a jewelry box."

The grandparents shook their heads and stared back at their black squares and white squares and wooden bishops and knights and pawns (for you know that grandparents just love games that put their tired hands in control), and the girls on the rooftops went back to cutting blue ribbons





and tying their legs to iron posts and chimneys and other girls' arms.

But the cooks in town tore off planks from their sundecks and paddled toward the call. And each one assumed that the other had made the call. And each one assumed that the other knew what it meant. That it, until they came to a tall stone attic rocking back and forth on its hind planks and groaning when the tide slapped salt and spray up its piping.

They were obviously cooks because one man with eyes like spare buttons had a shrimptail dangling from his lower lip; and one man (with two eyes like blue kites wandering here and there) kept stirring the ocean with his forearms and tasting it every now and then, saying "It could use a little salt," or "I wish everyone would just stop moving about, this really must set for half an hour."

"Tombs of bottled titmice, vaults of salted betelnuts, a gyroscope eloped with the duchess of a jewelry box..." Each cook thought the other cook was making the announcement, and each thought that the other knew what it meant. That is, until everyone had congregated inside.

The attic was stone and empty, and the circle of cooks were disappointed until one man pushed a slab of granite off a trap door in the corner. And I will tell you now that of all the attics floating to and fro in the tide, this was the only one which had a cellar. And it was a cellar to be celebrated. And there was tomb after tomb of bottled titmice, and vault after vault of salted betelnuts. And there was a gyroscope whirling up and down the cellar, with a string of black pearls flying from its pole. And in the center of the floor of the one true cellar left in the world, in the center of the Circle Congregation of Concerned Cooks, there was a saucepan.

The cook with eyes like spare buttons took charge (and he had swallowed the shrimp tail in his astonishment), "What is needed here is an invocation to the saucepan." And at once the cooks accepted that pan as their guru, and consecrated the cellar grounds with oregano and basil and thyme from a spice rack on the back wall. And the cooks all agreed, "What is needed here is an invocation to the great and omnipotent saucepan!" And young girls wrapped in blue ribbons appeared in the doorway and played games with scissors in the shadows of the cellar, and they lost their tongues and voices in the rafters of ribbon which bound them together, and the cooks stood up and saw the saucepan glowing in seasalt, and they raised their heads and opened their eyes like fine cutlery, and while they chanted shrimptails flew from their mouths and nostrils, and seasnails stuck between their teeth, and they could feel the food of the ocean materialize in their mouths as they spit into the saucepan and chanted, "An invocation to the great and omnipotent cellar saucepan. Oh saucepan, muse of fine dining and mystical epicurean of the cellar, inspire us to sing of the sage and the seasalt. Bring us to the re-creation of cutlery with the steady hum of your rim and send spirits of lost liquors to our wives. Oh saucepan, cook for us the wheat fields and the rolling hills, the landscapes and cityscapes all under the cloud of burnt liquor and rolling

sweat. Ignite yourself with the sulfur and the silverfish and serve us saucepan tales by cellar-light!"

The girls who had tied their tongues together danced around the cooks with scissors and blue ribbon and the saucepan boomed and roared and kicked and sputtered and spoke out in scattered syllables, then sentences, and then strings of sentences as the first story boomed and roared from the smoke...

## *Acupuncture*

Graham Alexander Bell was staring at the dot that was branded on his forehead, but try as he might, he could only make out the peripheral traces of his nose. "What we have here is a lack of vision beyond the periphery," he was told by the Young Acupuncturists. And maybe this was the reason he was trying to stare at the dot on his forehead, cuffed to a drafting table wearing only his boots and waiting for a few college-boys to sterilize their needles and pokers and cattle-prods.

They had sharp teeth and sharp points and pricks and pokers and cattle-prods, but he lost the smell of their breath in the glaze of camphor and caustics and blood alcohol. And then he lost them altogether in the smell of a kitchen rag and ether, causing him to drown in the lap-coats and succumb to the toxins cluttered like paper-moths around the overhead lantern.

The first boy was a tall boy with a tall lab-coat and green eyes. But as he thrust a needle into Graham Bell's throat, a jet of steam like froth from cold chowder soup sprayed from the puncture wound and cried, "Dae ye hear me speakin aboot masel'?" And the words distilled and separated and congregated again around the head-lantern like so many paper-moths.

And the lab-coats were up in arms! And the steam had gone and stolen their words, so that all that remained to do was pierce him again. The second boy was a scarve boy. There were plaid scarves on his ankles and silk scarves in sequins tied to his sash, and scarve upon wool scarve upon cotton and rattler and wolf and bull skinned scarve and scarves draped like byzantian onion domes over his hat. In fact, one might peel him like an onion from his scarves and find a few rusting bones or eyeballs rolling down where his toes might have been, or maybe a gold watch and a fingernail were decomposing in his face.

The scarve-boy needled Graham Bell's palm as timidly as one might expect him to. And words sprang out from the puncture-mark, and the needle shot out and pinned a moth to the ceiling. The words cried, "If any of ye say anither word, I'll hav ye wishin he was fur fur awae. Siddoon, siddoon and haud yer tongues." And the words distilled and separated and congregated again around the overhead lantern like so many screaming paper-moths.

The scarve boy and the tall boy with green eyes and all of the lab-coats sprung at the cadaver, and they stuck in hot pins, and steam was spouting in rows across Graham's ribcage, and in hot springs on his knees and like so many

smoke-needles resurrected on his toes. And by the light of the kerosene, words shot from the pores of his skin like ripe mosquitoes, and then sentences condensed in the steam, and paragraphs encircled the lantern like a festival of moths screaming story upon story in the overhead.

Listen to the first story, steaming from Graham's belly...

## *The Buddha and the Bellman*

I noo the Buddha! Ay, dae I iver noo the Buddha! I've slept miself abin and ablow him...

### IN ALAHIYI

#### *from a Cherokee love charm*

*by David Sparenberg*

In Alahiyyi you make your home, mysterious  
woman.

Now you have come near to hear me.

In Alahiyyi is your home, light woman.

No one is ever lonely  
when with you.

O—you are beautiful!

Instantly you have made me a light man.

No one is ever lonely  
when with me.

I will not be downcast;

I will never be a bluman.

You have brought down to me  
the road of light.

In midearth you have placed me.

I stand tall on mother earth.

No one is ever lonely  
when with me.

I am handsome for you.

You have put me into the house of light.

I will be there through life's journey.

No one will ever  
be lonely when with me.

You have caused this  
magic to happen!

There  
in Alahiyyi,  
woman,  
you are listening.

I am of the Wolf Clan,  
the one destined for you.

No one is ever lonely  
when with me.

Let her put her soul  
in the center of my soul,  
never to turn away.

I belong to the clan fated for you,  
when the seven clans were made.

I am fated to be a light man,  
my face toward the Sun Land.

No one is ever lonely  
when with me.

I cannot become downcast.

Covered with the eternal  
house of light,  
no one is ever lonely  
when with me.

Your soul has come to the center  
of my soul.

I embrace your soul.

Your childhood was in  
Alahiyyi.